United Nations A/53/PV.97

General Assembly
Fifty-third Session

Official Records

97th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 7 April 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Jemat (Brunei Darussalam), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

Tribute to the memory of Mr. Jumabek Ibraimov, late Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic

The Acting President: This afternoon it is my sad duty to pay tribute to the memory of the late Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic, His Excellency Mr. Jumabek Ibraimov, who passed away on 4 April 1999.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I request the representative of Kyrgyzstan to convey our condolences to the Government and the people of Kyrgyzstan and to the bereaved family of His Excellency Mr. Jumabek Ibraimov.

I invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of His Excellency Mr. Jumabek Ibraimov.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

Reports of the Fifth Committee

The Acting President: The General Assembly will now consider the reports of the Fifth Committee on agenda items 112, 112 and 119, 113, 114, 117, 118, 119, 141, 143 (a) and 145.

I request the rapporteur of the Fifth Committee, Mr. Tammam Sulaiman of the Syrian Arab Republic, to introduce the reports of the Fifth Committee in one intervention.

Mr. Sulaiman (Syrian Arab Republic), Rapporteur of the Fifth Committee (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour today to present to the General Assembly the reports of the Fifth Committee on the agenda items dealt with during the first part of the resumed fifty-third session of the General Assembly, which was held at Headquarters from 8 to 31 March 1999.

Under agenda item 112, entitled "Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations", the Committee considered the question of procurement reform in the United Nations. In this connection, the report of the Committee is contained in document A/53/521/Add.2. In paragraph 11 of that report, the Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft resolution entitled "Procurement-related arbitration". In paragraph 12 of the same report, the Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of two draft decisions concerning management irregularities causing financial losses to the Organization and procurement reform, respectively. The draft resolution and the two draft decisions were adopted by the Committee without a vote.

Under agenda item 113, entitled, "Programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999", the Committee considered the question of the Development Account and

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the financing of the Integrated Management Information System project. In this regard, the report of the Fifth Committee is contained in document A/53/485/Add.2. In paragraph 13 of that report, the Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft resolution concerning the Integrated Management Information System project and a draft resolution on the Development Account. In paragraph 14 of that report, the Committee recommends to the Assembly the adoption of a draft decision dealing with the question of the implementation of pilot projects on budgetary practices and procedures. Both draft resolutions and the draft decision were adopted by the Committee without a vote.

Under agenda item 114, entitled "Programme planning", the report of the Committee is contained in document A/53/743/Add.1. In paragraph 6 of that report, the Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft decision to transmit the note by the Secretariat on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1996-1997 to the Committee for Programme and Coordination for consideration at its thirty-ninth session. The oral decision was adopted by the Committee without a vote.

Under agenda item 117, entitled "Pattern of conferences", the Committee considered three reports of the Secretary-General, namely, on the provision of interpretation services to meetings of the regional and other major groupings of Member States, on improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office in Nairobi and on the impact of economy measures on the delivery of mandated conference services. In this connection, the report of the Committee is contained in document A/53/744/Add.1. In paragraph 6 of that report, the Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft decision to take note of the first two reports of the Secretary-General and to transmit the third one to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for consideration in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. This oral draft decision was adopted by the Committee without a vote.

Under agenda item 118, entitled "Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations", the Committee considered the report of the Committee on Contributions on its special session, regarding the request for exemption to Article 19. In this connection, the report of the Fifth Committee is contained in document A/53/464/Add.4. In paragraph 6 of that report, the Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of an oral draft decision proposed by the Chairman of the Fifth Committee, which was adopted by the Committee without a vote.

The report on the Fifth Committee's consideration of agenda item 119, entitled "Human resources management", is contained in document A/53/748/Add.1. In paragraph 7 of that report, the Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft resolution that was adopted by the Committee without a vote, as orally revised.

Regarding the question of gratis personnel, which was also considered under agenda item 112, the report of the Committee is contained in document A/53/533/Add.1. In paragraph 9 of that report, the Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft resolution that was adopted by the Committee without a vote, as orally revised.

With regard to agenda item 141, entitled "Financing of the United Nations Support Mission in Haiti, the United Nations Transition Mission in Haiti and the United Nations Civilian Police Mission in Haiti", the report of the Committee is contained in document A/53/873. In paragraph 6 of that report, the Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft resolution that was adopted by the Committee without a vote.

Concerning agenda item 143 (a), entitled "Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations: financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations", in particular the question of death and disability benefits, the report of the Committee is contained in document A/53/522/Add.2. In paragraph 5 of that report, the Committee recommends to the General Assembly a draft decision to take note of the report of the Secretary-General on that question. The oral draft decision proposed by the Chairman of the Committee was adopted in the Committee by consensus.

Concerning agenda item 145, entitled "Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 48/218 B", the report of the Committee is contained in document A/53/891, and in paragraph 4 of that report the Committee recommends to the General Assembly that it resume consideration of this agenda item at the second part of its resumed fifty-third session. This oral draft decision was adopted by the Committee by consensus.

Finally, allow me to thank members of the Secretariat for their valuable contribution to the work of the Committee, especially during the very late night meetings; and to address special thanks to the Secretariat team of the Fifth Committee, and especially to Mr. Joseph Acakpo-Satchivi, for their unflagging dedication to the success of the work of the Committee.

The Acting President: The positions of delegations regarding the recommendations of the Fifth Committee have been made clear in the Committee and are reflected in the relevant official records.

May I remind members that, under paragraph 7 of decision 34/401, the General Assembly agreed that

> "When the same draft resolution is considered in a Main Committee and in plenary meeting, a delegation should, as far as possible, explain its vote only once, i.e., either in the Committee or in plenary meeting unless that delegation's vote in plenary meeting is different from its vote in the Committee."

May I remind delegations that, also in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes.

Before we begin to take action on the recommendations contained in the reports of the Fifth Committee, I should like to advise representatives that we are going to proceed to take decisions in the same manner as was done in the Fifth Committee.

Agenda item 112 (*continued*)

Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations

Report of the Fifth Committee (Part III) (A/53/521/Add.2)

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution recommended in paragraph 11 of its report (A/53/521/Add.2) and on the two draft decisions recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 12 of the same report.

I call on the representative of the United States of America, who wishes to make a statement in explanation of position.

Mr. Bond (United States of America): First of all, the United States regrets the deferral of procurement reform to the May session of the Fifth Committee — a session, moreover, that should be devoted exclusively to consideration of peacekeeping issues.

Procurement is a management function in which efficiency and effectiveness can be measured in terms of dollars and in terms of implementation of programme objectives.

The Secretariat has made significant progress on procurement reform. The General Assembly should have given it due credit, for example, for increasing the percentage of procurements that were competitively bid; for dramatically improving the quality of Headquarters staff; and for relying less on assistance from Governments in peacekeeping procurement.

But more remains to be done. The Committee should highlight this for the Secretariat's attention. For example, the competitive bidding process needs further strengthening to ensure that vendors are given a reasonable time for submission of bids. Procurement staff in the field must be brought up to the same level of professionalism as Headquarters staff through training and rotational assignments. A system for measuring procurement performance should be established, for example, to measure timeliness in processing procurements.

The pending arbitration cases provide a stark example of the cost of the United Nations being unequipped to handle the large-scale urgent procurement required during the period of rapidly expanding peacekeeping operations. Adoption of this draft resolution will be a sign that the General Assembly wants assurances that systems are in place that will prevent or reduce reoccurrences of contract disputes of this nature.

Therefore, my delegation hopes that there will be expeditious action in May to adopt a comprehensive resolution on procurement reform.

The Acting President: We turn first to the draft resolution entitled "Procurement-related arbitration", which the Fifth Committee adopted without a vote.

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to do likewise?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 53/217).

The Acting President: We turn next to the two draft decisions.

The Fifth Committee adopted draft decision I, entitled "Management irregularities causing financial losses to the Organization", without a vote.

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to do likewise?

Draft decision I was adopted.

The Acting President: The Fifth Committee adopted draft decision II, entitled "Procurement reform", without a vote.

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to do the same?

Draft decision II was adopted.

The Acting President: We have concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 112.

Agenda items 112 and 119 (*continued*)

Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations

Human resources management

Report of the Fifth Committee (Part II) (A/53/533/Add.1)

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 9 of its report (A/53/533/Add.1).

The Fifth Committee adopted the draft resolution, entitled "Gratis personnel provided by Governments", without a vote.

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to do likewise?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 53/218).

The Acting President: We have concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 112 and 119.

Agenda item 113 (*continued*)

Programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/53/485/Add.2)

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on the two draft resolutions recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 13 of its report (A/53/485/Add.2) and one draft decision recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 14 of the same report.

We turn first to draft resolution I, entitled "Integrated Management Information System". The Fifth Committee adopted the draft resolution without a vote.

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

Draft resolution I was adopted (resolution 53/219).

The Acting President: The Fifth Committee adopted draft resolution II, entitled "Development Account", without a vote.

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do likewise?

Draft resolution II was adopted (resolution 53/220).

The Acting President: We next turn to the draft decision entitled "Impact of the implementation of pilot projects on budgetary practices and procedures". The Fifth Committee adopted the draft decision without a vote.

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft decision was adopted.

The Acting President: We have concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 113.

Agenda item 114 (*continued*)

Programme planning

Report of the Fifth Committee (Part II) (A/53/743/Add.1)

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft decision recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 6 of its report.

The Fifth Committee adopted the draft decision without a vote. May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft decision was adopted.

The Acting President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 114.

Agenda item 117 (*continued*)

Pattern of conferences

Report of the Fifth Committee (Part II) (A/53/744/Add.1)

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft decision recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 6 of its report.

The Fifth Committee adopted the draft decision without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft decision was adopted.

The Acting President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 117.

Agenda item 118 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations

Report of the Fifth Committee (Part V) (A/53/464/Add.4)

Letter from the Permanent Representative of Honduras to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/53/900)

The Acting President: The representative of Honduras has asked for the floor. Bearing in mind rule 66 of the rules of procedure, and in the absence of an objection, I give him the floor.

Mr. Noé-Pino (Honduras) (*spoke in Spanish*): As the Assembly is aware, on 5 January we submitted a request to the President of the General Assembly that Honduras be exempted from the provisions of the first part of Article 19 of the Charter relating to the suspension of the right to vote in the General Assembly.

Our primary justification at that time was that hurricane Mitch had had a devastating effect on Honduras at the end of 1998. The President of the General Assembly kindly referred our request to the Committee on Contributions for consideration. In the communication to which I referred, and in our presentation to the Committee on Contributions, we said that Honduras would make the necessary efforts to bring its payments to the United Nations up to date in the course of the year.

On Monday this week, we made the necessary payments to the Secretariat; several additional days will be required for the process to be completed. Accordingly, today we request that the name of our country be deleted from the decision now before the General Assembly under agenda item 118, entitled "Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations".

I should like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the support of the President of the General Assembly and for the understanding and goodwill of the Fifth Committee and of most of the

members of the Committee on Contributions with regard to our request. However, we wish to express our disagreement with the comments concerning our country made by one member of the Committee on Contributions, reflected in the addendum to the Committee's report. We reject such comments as superficial and inaccurate, insofar as they denote a lack of awareness not only of the current situation in Honduras, but also of the sacrifices made by our authorities and our people in order to remain current in our obligations to the United Nations.

The Acting President: Before we proceed further, I should like to repeat, for clarification, that the representative of Honduras proposed that his country's name be deleted from the text of the draft decision recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 6 of its report.

If there is no objection, the Assembly will now proceed to take a decision on the draft decision recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 6 of its report, as orally amended by the representative of Honduras.

The Fifth Committee adopted the draft decision without a vote. May I consider that the Assembly wishes to adopt the draft decision, as orally amended?

The draft decision, as orally amended, was adopted.

The Acting President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 118.

Agenda item 119 (*continued*)

Human resources management

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/53/748/Add.1)

The Acting President: I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in explanation of position before action is taken on the draft resolution contained in document A/53/748/Add.1.

May I remind delegations that explanations of vote or position are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Barnwell (Guyana): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The Group of 77 and China notes with concern the issues raised in the statement made by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management on paragraph 22 of section V of the draft resolution on human resources management, contained in document A/C.5/53/SR.54, at the concluding meeting of the first part of the resumed fifty-third session of the Fifth Committee on 31 March 1999.

The Group of 77 and China is of the view that implementation of paragraph 22 of section V of the draft resolution in document A/53/748/Add.1 should be in accordance with paragraph 2 of the same section of the draft resolution, which states,

> "recruitment, appointment and promotion of staff shall be made without distinction as to race, sex or religion, in accordance with the principles of the Charter and the provisions of the Staff Regulations and Rules".

In the light of the statement by Mrs. Rafiah Salim, the Group of 77 and China would like to request the Secretary-General to inform the General Assembly of the impact of, and any difficulties arising from, the implementation of paragraph 22 of section V of the draft resolution in document A/53/748/Add.1 to enable the General Assembly to revert to this issue.

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines): While the Philippines has serious reservations on paragraph 22 of section V of the draft resolution contained in paragraph 7 of the report of the Fifth Committee in document A/53/748/Add.1, it did not wish to stand in the way of facilitating the work of the Fifth Committee; nor does it wish to stand in the way of facilitating the work of the General Assembly this afternoon.

The Philippines, however, wishes to reaffirm that the staff is an invaluable asset of the Organization and commends the tireless efforts and dedication of staff in the furtherance of the purposes and principles of the United Nations. The Philippines pays tribute to all the staff members who have lost their lives in the service of the Organization.

The Philippines is therefore deeply distressed that the draft resolution before us fails to recognize or even fully appreciate the important work and significant contribution of staff in the General Service and other categories to the effective functioning of this Organization. We deeply regret that their aspirations for upward mobility are not fully appreciated. We fully appreciate the extra efforts they make in obtaining, for

example, a university degree at their own expense to enable them to qualify to take the competitive examination for promotion to the Professional category and above. The opportunities for their promotion to the Professional category are already limited by the small number of posts set aside for the G-to-P examinations.

The Philippines deeply regrets that the window of opportunity for General Service staff based on nationalities may be closed to them because of the inclusion of the phrase "equitable geographical distribution" as part of the realignment of the national competitive examinations and the G-to-P examinations in paragraph 22 of section V of the draft resolution. It is our firm belief that the G-to-P examinations should be regarded as a promotion exercise and not as a recruitment exercise. As such, General Service staff of all nationalities must be given equal opportunities to be promoted, with a view to ensuring the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity. It is further our firm belief that it is not the intent, in letter or spirit, of the General Assembly to take a decision that will in effect discriminate against certain General Service staff on the basis of their nationalities. In an Organization such as the United Nations discrimination based on nationality should not be tolerated.

In this regard, we support the statement made by the representative of Guyana, who spoke on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on paragraph 22 of section V of the draft resolution. We thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management for drawing attention to the implications of the inclusion of the phrase "equitable geographical distribution" in paragraph 22 of section V of the draft resolution. We reiterate our firm belief that there should be no distinction as to nationality, race, sex or religion in the promotion of staff, in accordance with the principles of the Charter and the provisions of the Staff Regulations and Rules.

The Philippines fully supports the request of the Group of 77 and China that the Secretary-General inform the General Assembly of the full impact of, and any difficulties arising from, the implementation of paragraph 22 of section V of the draft resolution, to enable the General Assembly to revert to this issue. We urge the Secretary-General to provide this information at a later session before any amendments are made to the conditions under which General Service staff may take the examinations for promotion to the Professional category and above.

Mr. Saha (India): We fully associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Guyana, who spoke on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The issues raised in the statement on this agenda item made by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management, Mrs. Rafiah Salim, at the concluding session of the first part of the resumed fifty-third session of the Fifth Committee, on 31 March 1999, as well as the points mentioned by the Permanent Representative of the Philippines, need to be addressed. My delegation would therefore request that the requisite information be provided to enable the General Assembly to revert to this issue at a later session.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of position before action is taken.

The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 7 of its report (A/53/748/Add.1).

The Fifth Committee adopted the draft resolution without a vote.

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to do likewise?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 53/221).

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 119.

Agenda item 141

Financing of the United Nations Support Mission in Haiti, the United Nations Transition Mission in Haiti and the United Nations Civilian Police Mission in Haiti

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/53/873)

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 6 of its report.

The Fifth Committee adopted the draft resolution without a vote.

May I consider that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 53/222).

The Acting President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 141.

Agenda item 143 (*continued*)

Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations

(a) Financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations

Report of the Fifth Committee (Part III) (A/53/522/Add.2)

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft decision recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 5 of its report.

The Fifth Committee adopted the draft decision, entitled "Death and disability benefits" without a vote.

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft decision was adopted.

The Acting President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 143.

Agenda item 145

Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 48/218 B

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/53/891)

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft decision recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 4 of its report.

The Fifth Committee adopted the draft decision without a vote.

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft decision was adopted.

The Acting President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 145.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

Request for the reopening of the consideration of agenda item 12 (Report of the Economic and Social Council)

Note by the Secretary-General (A/53/899)

The Acting President: In his note, the Secretary-General informs the General Assembly that the Economic and Social Council, by its resolution 1999/3 of 25 March 1999, recommended to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft resolution entitled "Revision of the General Regulations of the World Food Programme", the text of which is contained in the annex to document A/53/899.

In order for the General Assembly to consider the draft resolution, it will be necessary to reopen consideration of item 12 of the agenda of the fifty-third session.

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to reopen consideration of agenda item 12?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: May I further take it that the Assembly agrees to proceed immediately to the consideration of agenda item 12?

If I see no objection, we shall proceed accordingly.

Agenda item 12 (*continued*)

Report of the Economic and Social Council (A/53/899)

The Acting President: In connection with this item, the General Assembly has before it a draft resolution, entitled "Revision of the General Regulations of the World Food Programme", contained in the annex to the report of the Economic and Social Council, document A/53/899.

The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution before it. May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to adopt the draft resolution?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 53/223).

The Acting President: In accordance with the relevant provision of General Assembly resolution 48/162, it is expected that the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations will adopt a parallel resolution at its next session in 1999.

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 12.

Agenda item 16 (*continued*)

Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections

(a) Election of seven members of the Committee for Programme and Coordination

Note by the Secretary-General (A/53/440/Add.2)

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly decision 42/450 of 17 December 1987, the Assembly elects the members of the Committee for Programme and Coordination upon their nomination by the Economic and Social Council. Members will recall that at its 43rd and 94th meetings, held on 26 October 1998 and 18 February 1999 respectively, the General Assembly elected seven members to the Committee for a term of office expiring on 31 December 2001, and that there remained one vacancy from a previous session from among the Western European and other States for a term of office beginning on the date of election and expiring on 31 December 1999.

In this connection, the Assembly has before it document A/53/440/Add.2 containing the nomination by the Economic and Social Council to fill that remaining vacancy in the Committee from among the Western European and other States.

As indicated in that document the Economic and Social Council has nominated Portugal to fill the remaining vacancy from among the Western European and other States.

In accordance with rule 92 of the rules of procedure, all elections should be held by secret ballot. However, in accordance with paragraph 16 of decision 34/401, the Assembly may, in elections to subsidiary organs, dispense with secret balloting when the number of candidates corresponds to the number of seats to be filled.

May I therefore take it that the Assembly wishes to declare Portugal elected a member of the Committee for Programme and Coordination for a term of office beginning on 7 April 1999 and expiring on 31 December 1999?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: I congratulate Portugal, which has been elected a member of the Committee for Programme and Coordination.

We have thus concluded our consideration of agenda item 16.

Agenda item 58 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the United Nations system

Draft resolution (A/53/L.74)

Agenda item 94 (*continued*)

Environment and sustainable development

(c) Implementation of the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

Draft resolution (A/53/L.76)

The Acting President: Members will recall that at its 3rd plenary meeting, held on 15 September 1998, the General Assembly allocated agenda item 94 to the Second Committee. Subsequently, at its 91st plenary meeting, held on 15 December 1998, the General Assembly decided not to conclude its consideration of sub-item (c) of agenda item 94, so that it might take a decision on the dates of its special session on small island developing States.

The General Assembly has before it, under agenda item 58, a draft resolution contained in document A/53/L.74 and, under sub-item (c) of agenda item 94, a draft resolution contained in document A/53/L.76.

It will further be recalled that at the 95th and 96th plenary meetings, held on 23 and 24 March 1999 respectively, members were urged to arrive at a consensus on the closing date of the fifty-third session of the Assembly, the opening date of the fifty-fourth session, the dates of the general debate of the fifty-fourth

session, and the dates of the two-day special session on small island developing States.

Before we proceed further, I propose to suspend the meeting for consultations.

The meeting was suspended at 4.15 p.m. and resumed at 4.50 p.m.

The Acting President: We shall now continue with the consideration of agenda item 58 and sub item (c) of agenda item 94.

After consultations, an agreement has been reached on the dates, thus enabling the Assembly to act on the two draft resolutions before us. However, before we proceed to act on the two draft resolutions, I should like to outline the agreement reached on the various dates.

As indicated in draft resolution A/53/L.74, the fifty third session of the General Assembly will close on Monday, 13 September 1999, and the fifty fourth session will open on Tuesday, 14 September. As indicated in draft resolution A/53/L.76, the special session of the General Assembly on small island developing States will be held on Monday and Tuesday, 27 and 28 September 1999.

As a result of the dates agreed upon in those two draft resolutions, it was further agreed that the general debate of the fifty fourth session will be held for the first week from Monday, 20 September, to Saturday, 25 September, and for the second week from Wednesday, 29 September, to Saturday, 2 October.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Perfiliev (Director, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division): I should like to inform members that the holding of general debate of the fifty fourth session on Saturday, 25 September 1999, and on Saturday, 2 October 1999, would involve some limited additional requirements for overtime relating to technical servicing of the meetings. These additional requirements would be met from within the revised appropriation approved by the General Assembly for the biennium 1998-1999.

The Acting President: We shall now proceed to consider draft resolutions A/53/L.74 and A/53/L.76.

I call on the representative of South Africa, who wishes to speak in explanation of position before action is taken on the draft resolutions.

May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Vermeulen (South Africa): I would like to express thanks on behalf of the Joint Coordinating Committee (JCC), for this opportunity to present the position of the JCC on the issue of the closing date of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly and the opening date of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

The JCC has taken note of the President's proposal, as contained in draft resolution A/53/L.74, which is before us, and we wish to inform the President that the JCC is prepared to consider his proposal favourably in the interests of reaching consensus on this matter. We therefore concur with his proposal that the fifty-third session shall close on Monday, 13 September 1999, and that the fifty-fourth session shall open on Tuesday, 14 September 1999

It is also our understanding that this exceptional arrangement will apply only to the opening date of the fifty-fourth session, and that the opening dates of future sessions of the General Assembly shall be the subject of further deliberations. In this context, I wish to reiterate the view of the JCC that we should revert to the provision in rule 1 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, namely, that each session shall commence on the third Tuesday in September. This is the only precedent that has been set in this regard, and it had evolved into a practice which has served us well in the past.

It is also our understanding that the annual general debate will commence the following week, namely, on Monday, 20 September 1999.

In order to benefit from the presence of prominent world leaders at the United Nations during that time of the year and to encourage greater interaction among leaders from both the developed and the developing world, the JCC supports the convening of the special session to review the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States on 27 and 28 September 1999,

as proposed in draft resolution A/53/L.76, which is also before us.

Allow me to conclude by congratulating the President on the outcome of the extensive consultations that were conducted under his guidance. It is both the understanding and the wish of the JCC that the two draft resolutions before us today will be adopted by consensus.

The Acting President: The Assembly will first, under agenda item 58, take a decision on draft resolution A/53/L.74, entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations system".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 53/224).

The Acting President: The Assembly will next, under sub-item (c) of agenda item 94, take a decision on draft resolution A/53/L.76, entitled "Implementation of the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States". May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt this draft resolution?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 53/189 B).

The Acting President: The note verbale concerning the general debate of the fifty-fourth session will be transmitted to delegations as soon as possible.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 58 and of sub-item (c) of agenda item 94.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.